

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Thursday, April 1, 2021
Maundy Thursday**

IF YOU ARE WILLING

Luke 22:39-46

The story the Bible tells of the final week of Jesus' life is not just a "story" that someone(s) made up. It is not a work of fiction, inspired or otherwise. The events described really did happen. They are not the product of the imaginations of the Gospel writers. While Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John include different details of Jesus' final days, they follow this basic chronology:

Sunday: Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.

Monday: Jesus drives the merchants and bankers out of the Temple.

Tuesday: Jesus debates the Jewish leaders in the Temple courts and teaches His disciples at the Mount of Olives.

Wednesday: The Bible doesn't say what Jesus did on this day. Most likely He remained in Bethany with His disciples.

Thursday: Following Jesus' instructions, the disciples make preparations for the Passover meal.

Friday (which in Jewish time began at sundown Thursday and went until sundown Friday): Jesus eats the Last Supper in the Upper Room with His disciples, washes His disciples' feet, institutes the Lord's Supper, goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray; He is betrayed by Judas and arrested, tried by Jewish and Roman authorities, disowned by Peter, condemned to die, put to death on a Roman cross, and buried in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea.

Saturday: A day of inestimable grief, sadness, and confusion for the followers of Jesus, as He rests in the tomb.

Sunday: Resurrection Day! Jesus is raised from the dead, the tomb is empty (except for the grave clothes Jesus left behind), and the risen Lord Jesus appears to His disciples alive.

This evening I want to focus on Jesus' prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives following the Last Supper on the night before His suffering and death on the cross for us.

The NIV Life Application Bible gives these verses the heading: "Jesus Agonizes in the Garden." *The Message* calls it "A Dark Night." One Bible commentator (Leon Morris)

entitles it “The Agony.” Another (Warren Wiersbe) describes what took place that night under the heading, “The Night They Arrested God.”

“Agony” is an appropriate word for what Jesus experienced in the Garden. Verse 44 says He was “in anguish.” The word Luke uses there is *agonia*. It is the only place the word is used in the New Testament. Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was “sorrowful” or “deeply distressed” and “troubled” in His soul as He contemplated His impending death. He said to the disciples: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matthew 26:37-38; Mark 14:33-34).

It was not primarily the physical pain and suffering He would have to endure that caused this agony in His soul, as incomprehensibly awful as it must have been. If you have never read a description of the actual process of crucifixion, as Jesus experienced, I encourage you to do so. The chapter on the crucifixion in Lee Strobel’s book, *The Case for Christ*, will give you a good picture. Or watch the depiction of the crucifixion in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. It will make an indelible impression.

But the physical pain and suffering of crucifixion were not what Jesus dreaded the most. (The fact that Jesus dreaded what He would have to go through shows the genuineness of His humanness. Yes, He was fully God. But He was also fully human. His humanness is on full display in the agony and distress of soul He experienced in the Garden.) What Jesus dreaded the most was the spiritual separation from God the Father He would have to endure in order to accomplish our salvation. What Jesus dreaded the most was the experience of being forsaken by the Father as He bore our sins in His body on the cross. What He dreaded the most was the righteous judgment and wrath of God that would fall on Him as He bore the full weight of our sins – and the sins of the whole world. That is what caused Jesus to be in such agony and distress as He prayed to the Father in the Garden.

Jesus was in such agony, in fact, that Luke says “His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (22:44). “Sweating blood” is an actual medical condition called *hematidrosis* (or *hematohidrosis*). It is extremely rare, but in extremely rare (!) circumstances, when a person is under extraordinary stress, emotional anguish, or physical strain, the capillary blood vessels may rupture, causing sweat and blood to mix. We don’t know if that is exactly what happened with Jesus; Luke says His sweat was *like* drops of blood, not that He was actually sweating blood. What is obvious, though, is that Jesus was undergoing an extremely severe level of emotional and physical trauma.

Jesus knew what was in store for Him – both the physical pain and suffering of crucifixion (as well as the emotional and physical abuse and humiliation leading up to it) and the spiritual trauma of being cut off from the Father and drinking “the cup” of God’s just and righteous wrath for sin. For *our* sin. Yours and mine. Jesus could see it all. And so, in His humanness, He wished for a way out. If there was any other way to accomplish His mission to save us from our sins, He asked the Father to spare Him the suffering He knew was ahead.

The prayer of Jesus in the Garden was (as His prayers always were) so honest. So heartfelt. And so humble. He said: “Father, if You are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will,

but Yours be done” (22:42). Both Matthew (26:36-46) and Mark (14:32-42) tell us that Jesus prayed this prayer three times in the Garden that night. Three times He asked the Father to spare Him the horrors of the cross. All three times, He submitted to the Father’s will. As much as He wanted to avoid the cross, His even greater desire was to do the Father’s will and to complete the mission on which He had come from heaven. As Thabiti Anyabwile says: “Though the Son prays three times for the cup (of God’s judgment) to be removed, each time the Father returns a silent *No* from heaven. The Father said *No* to the Son in order to say *Yes* to us” (Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke*, 331).

Do you hear that? The Father said *No* to the Son in order to say *Yes* to us. That should give you an idea of how much you matter to God and how much God loves you. The Father said *No* to Jesus in order to say *Yes* to you and me. And Jesus, knowing there was no other way to accomplish your salvation and mine, no other way to reconcile us to God, no other way to give us peace with God, willingly said *Yes* to the Father’s will: “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

Philip Yancey put it this way: “When Jesus prayed to the One who could save Him from death, He did not get that salvation; He got instead the salvation of the world” (Yancey, “Jesus’ Unanswered Prayer,” www.preachingtoday.com, April 2000).

Paul David Tripp is one of my favorite authors. His daily devotional book *New Morning Mercies* is filled with spiritual treasures. In his newest book, a 40-day Lenten devotional called *Journey to the Cross*, he talks about the contrast between the willingness of Jesus and our unwillingness. He says: “We have hope because Jesus was willing.” Sin, though, causes us to be

Unwilling to forgive
 Unwilling to obey
 Unwilling to serve
 Unwilling to trust
 Unwilling to give
 Unwilling to make peace
 Unwilling to be gentle
 Unwilling to suffer
 Unwilling to submit
 Unwilling to sacrifice
 Unwilling to surrender

“The list,” he says, “could go on and on.” It is the selfishness of sin that so often makes us unwilling. “Our ‘me-ism,’” as he calls it, “puts us in the center. It makes life all about us: our wants, our needs, [our desires], and our feelings.” This has destructive implications for pretty much every aspect of our lives. “A marriage,” he says, “can’t work if a husband and wife are unwilling to live in self-sacrificing, forgiving love. A parent-child relationship falls apart when the parent is unwilling to be patient and kind or the child is unwilling to honor and obey. Friendships don’t work when the friends are unwilling to give and to serve. The workplace is hard and inefficient if the employer is unwilling to love his workers as he loves

himself. Unwillingness to be temperate with food and drink will destroy your health.... (S)o many of the problems we live with are the fruit of our [personal or] collective unwillingness to live as our wise and loving Creator has designed us to live.”

Isn't that the truth?

Tripp goes on to say: “God ... knew that the only way to rescue us from our unwillingness and its bitter fruit was to send His Son to be willing to be what we would never choose to be, to do what we would be unwilling to do, and to willingly die in our place.”

Luke's account of Jesus in the Garden, along with those of Matthew and Mark, gives us, in Tripp's words, “a clear window into the willingness of Jesus.... Because He is God, He knows the redemptive plan. He knows He is facing injustice, torture, public ridicule, the cruelest death possible, and [worst of all] the rejection of His Father, all because He is going to load our sin onto His own shoulders and pay our penalty. In His humanity, He is quaking at the thought of it all, and He asks if there is any possibility that there is another way. Will you stop for a moment and imagine what would be going through your heart and mind if you knew you were facing such horror? You and I get upset at a flat tire, a sassy child, a mean boss, an unexpected bill, or a bad day.”

I don't know about you, but I resemble that remark. Just yesterday I got really upset by what I think was really poor customer service at a nearby place of business. It took 15 minutes to accomplish something that should have taken no more than 2 minutes. I was not a paragon of patience. I'm glad none of you were there to see me.

“But Jesus,” Tripp says, “did not end His prayer with asking to be released from the sacrificial suffering awaiting Him. Instead, He said to His Father: ‘Not my will, but Yours, be done.’ That final sentence of Jesus' prayer in the Garden gives every sinner who ever lived hope. Jesus did not think of Himself first. He was not propelled by His own comfort. He did not protect His rights. He did not demand to be accepted and respected. He willingly forsook all the things that we think are our just due. He forsook those things willingly and without coercion. He was willing because He knew what was at stake and He knew what the result of His self-sacrifice would be.

“In the Garden there was angst and fear, but ... not a shred of selfishness or rebellion [against the Father]. In His humanity, (what He had to face) was a fearful thing to consider, but He had a submissive, loving, and willing heart. This moment of willingness is a moment of hope for all of us who, in our sin, have lives that are marked by unwillingness. Our hope in this life and the one to come is never to be found in our willingness to believe in and follow Him, but in His willingness to endure suffering and death for us. His willingness unleashes the grace we need to be forgiven and to become more and more willing to lay down our lives for His kingdom and His glory” (Tripp, *Journey to the Cross*, Day 39, 221-224).

Jesus counted the cost – and it was a costly cost. The Father said *No* to the Son in order to say *Yes* to us. And the Son said *Yes* to the Father in order to do what only He could do to bring us to God, to salvation and forgiveness and peace with God and eternal life.

Remember that tonight. Remember it tomorrow. Remember it always, for as long as you live, and then for all eternity. And give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.